

Firstly, I would like to say a big thank you to all Councillors for acknowledging the Climate Emergency and committing to positive actions to reduce emissions in the County.

The motion recently passed charged you to “**set up a task group of the Environment Select Committee to develop recommendations and a plan to achieve this pledge along with undertaking a carbon / renewables audit**”.

I understand that it may be a little early to be asking as you may not, as yet, have formally instructed the Environment Committee to form the Task Group(s). However, as this matter is extremely urgent for us all, I have a number of questions regarding the challenges set by the motion.

1. Can you confirm you will use **all reasonable endeavours** to achieve what you seek, i.e. a carbon neutral County by 2030.

The requested task group may take a review regarding what are “reasonable endeavours” in this context when forming its recommendations to the council’s Executive. These recommendations would need to be considered and endorsed by its parent committee, the Environment Select Committee, before being referred to the Executive for response. The Executive would then have its own view regarding “reasonable endeavours”.

2. **What is the timescale to carry out the carbon/renewables baseline survey** as this will set the scale of the challenge? Also, please confirm that this survey will be shared publicly.

The task group and Environment Select Committee would determine the timescale for its work, including the carbon / renewables audit requested, and what aspects of the task group’s deliberations and evidence base would be published (please see 3 below). If a task group is formed by Environment Select Committee, updates on its work would be reported at Environment Select Committee meetings.

3. **What will be the form of the Task groups** and will their meetings be open to public attendance?

Wiltshire Council’s Overview and Scrutiny task groups follow a Task Group Protocol. The Protocol states that task group meetings are not generally open to the public unless there are specific reasons for engaging with the public at a particular meeting, usually on a matter of local, public concern. However, task groups can operate flexibly, taking any approach they consider necessary to inform their deliberations.

Task group’s do bring regular updates on their work to their parent committees, which are published in the agenda papers. Task groups’ final reports, and the Executive’s responses to them, are also published (with the exception of content that is commercially sensitive or confidential).

4. **There is much expertise in the County already** and I note that you have committed to “work with partners in the private sector and civil society across the County”.

Can I ask that you form focus groups to make sure that local people are at the heart of the actions. This will gain buy in from people and joint ownership of plans and developments.

The task group and Environment Select Committee will be mindful of this commitment made by Full Council and of the further suggestion of focus groups.

5. Please confirm that your commitment to work with the private sector **includes those less willing to divest from fossil fuels**, or even those supplying and manufacturing from them.

This in order that they can transition to clean ways of working quickly.

When forming its recommendations to the Executive, the task group and Environment Select Committee will be mindful of this commitment made by Full Council and of the additional suggestion provided here. The Executive will also be made aware.

6. **In the private sector**, nationally and internationally, many ideas that could benefit Wiltshire could be attracted through financial support or even joint efforts with the Council.

Can you confirm environmental businesses will be encouraged to base themselves in the County and that you will be actively seeking out such businesses as a part of your aim to go carbon neutral?

The task group and Environment Select Committee would be mindful of this suggestion when forming any recommendations to the Executive. The task group would consider what the council currently does and its future intentions as part of the evidence it gathers. The Executive will also be made aware.

7. You have committed to “**work with other local government authorities** (both within the UK and internationally) to determine and implement best practice methods to limit Global Warming to less than 1.5°C”.

Can you confirm when you will engage with all likeminded Councils?

Will you consider setting up a “Conference of Councils”, including international ones, to meet in Wiltshire regularly to share the many ways in which we will be tackling the problems?

The task group and Environment Select Committee would be mindful of this decision of Full Council, and of the further suggestions provided, when forming any recommendations to the Executive. The Executive will also be made aware.

Overview and Scrutiny will report publicly on its work to the Executive and the Executive will then report publicly to Council to ensure a co-ordination of responses and actions.

8. When do you anticipate the first **6 monthly progress report** will be publicly available?

The task group and Environment Select Committee would be mindful of this request of Full Council and make recommendations to the Executive as appropriate. The Executive would determine when the first progress report would be provided.

9. At present you have confirmed that none of your reserves are invested in **fossil fuel**. However, you can only state that pension investments are not directly invested. Please confirm that all Council investments will immediately be divested from fossil fuel related businesses whether directly or indirectly.

Environmental issues are taken very seriously by the Wiltshire Pension Fund Committee, because these issues are important in achieving sustainable investment returns over the long term. Doing nothing is clearly not an option, and the Pension Fund takes a number of steps to ensure that the assets of the Fund are invested in bodies that adopt a responsible attitude towards the environment, and have sound ethical practices. This is done via a principle of engagement, as this is the most effective way to ensure that changes are made and best practices are followed. The Fund does not negatively screen companies that derive their revenues from fossil fuels, for example, instead the Fund attempts to make its voice heard by exercising its voting rights. The Fund employs the services of a voting organisation to ensure that votes are cast in line with this objective. In addition, the Fund is a member of the Local Authorities Pension Fund Forum (LAPFF), which enable it to act with other local authorities (72 with assets in excess of £175bn) on corporate governance issues. These principles are communicated to all the investment managers who manage assets for the Pension Fund. Looking to the future, the Brunel pool, in which the Pension Fund is a shareholder, and through which all investments will eventually be made, has a strong focus on environmental, social and governance issues. There is a dedicated Chief Responsible Investment Officer, and there are policies and reporting in place to ensure that the principles outlined above are followed. We are confident that this strong framework ensures that the Pension Fund is investing in an environmentally responsible way, and is helping to drive positive change through its actions.

Finally, we are running out of time, the IPCC gave us 12, now 11, years to significantly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. We need to act now. You have agreed there is a Climate Emergency. In the words of Greta Thunberg, please treat it as if our house is on fire, because it is.